

**Mark Kurlansky**

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Born: December 07, 1948 in Hartford, Connecticut, United States

Nationality: American

Occupation: Writer

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## PERSONAL INFORMATION:

Born December 7, 1948, in Hartford, CT; married; children: Talia. **Education:** Butler University, B.A., 1970. **Addresses:** Home: New York, NY. Agent: Charlotte Sheedy, The Charlotte Sheedy Agency, 928 Broadway, Ste. 901, New York, NY 10010.

## CAREER:

Former international correspondent for the *Chicago Tribune*, *Miami Herald*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and *Herald Tribune* (Paris, France), 1976-91. Freelance writer. Harman writer-in-residence, Baruch College, 2007. Has also worked as a commercial fisherman, a dock worker, a paralegal, a cook, and a pastry chef.

## AWARDS:

James A. Beard Award for excellence in food writing, 1998, for *Cod: A Biography of the Fish That Changed the World*; named to the Basque Hall of Fame by the Society of Basque Studies in America, 2001; honorary ambassadorship from the Basque government, 2001; *Bon Appetit* Food Writer of the Year, 2006; honorary Doctor of Letters, Butler University, 2007; Pluma Plata award, for *Salt*; Dayton Literary Peace Prize for Nonviolence, 2007; Gold Award, National Parenting Publications Awards, 2011, for *World without Fish*; Robert Laxalt Distinguished Writer Award, Reynolds School of Journalism, University of Nevada, Reno, 2012; Junior Library Guild Selection, 2015, for *Frozen in Time*.

## WORKS:

**WRITINGS:**

*A Continent of Islands: Searching for the Caribbean Destiny*, Addison-Wesley (Reading, MA), 1992.

*A Chosen Few: The Resurrection of European Jewry*, Addison-Wesley (Reading, MA), 1994.  
*Cod: A Biography of the Fish That Changed the World*, Walker & Co. (New York, NY), 1997.  
*The Basque History of the World*, Walker & Co. (New York, NY), 1999.  
*The White Man in the Tree, and Other Stories* (short fiction), Washington Square Press (New York, NY), 2000.  
*The Cod's Tale* (juvenile), Putnam (New York, NY), 2001.  
*Salt: A World History*, Walker & Co. (New York, NY), 2002.  
(Editor and illustrator) *Choice Cuts: A Savory Selection of Food Writing from Around the World and Throughout History*, Ballantine Books (New York, NY), 2002.  
*1968: The Year That Rocked the World*, Ballantine Books (New York, NY), 2004.  
(And illustrator) *The Girl Who Swam to Euskadi* (juvenile), translated into Basque by Javier Cillero Goiriastuena, Center for Basque Studies, University of Nevada, Reno (Reno, NV), 2005.  
*Boogaloo on Second Avenue: A Novel of Pastry, Guilt, and Music*, Ballantine Books (New York, NY), 2005.  
*The Big Oyster: History on the Half Shell*, Ballantine Books (New York, NY), 2006.  
*The Story of Salt* (juvenile), illustrated by S.D. Schindler, G.P. Putnam's Sons (New York, NY), 2006.  
*Nonviolence: Twenty-Five Lessons from the History of a Dangerous Idea*, Modern Library (New York, NY), 2006, also published as *Nonviolence: The History of a Dangerous Idea*, 2008.  
*The Last Fish Tale: The Fate of the Atlantic and Survival in Gloucester, America's Oldest Fishing Port and Most Original Town*, Ballantine Books (New York, NY), 2008.  
(Translator and author of introduction) Emile Zola, *The Belly of Paris*, Modern Library (New York, NY), 2009.  
*The Eastern Stars: How Baseball Changed the Dominican Town of San Pedro de Macoris*, Riverhead (New York, NY), 2009.  
(Editor and illustrator) *The Food of a Younger Land: A Portrait of American Food before the National Highway System, before Chain Restaurants, and before Frozen Food, When the Nation's Food Was Seasonal, Regional, and Traditional: From the Lost WPA Files*, Riverhead Books (New York, NY), 2009.  
*Edible Stories: A Novel in 16 Parts*, Riverhead Books (New York, NY), 2010.  
*What? Are These the Twenty Most Important Questions in Human History--or, Is This a Game of Twenty Questions?*, Walker (New York, NY), 2011.  
*Hank Greenberg: The Hero Who Didn't Want to Be One*, Yale University Press (New Haven, CT), 2011.  
*Battle Fatigue* (young adult novel), Walker Books & Co. (New York, NY), 2011.  
*World without Fish: How Could We Let This Happen?* (juvenile), Workman (New York, NY), 2011.  
*Birdseye: The Adventures of a Curious Man*, Doubleday (New York, NY), 2012.  
*Ready for a Brand New Beat: How "Dancing in the Street" Became the Anthem for a Changing America*, Riverhead Books (New York, NY), 2013.  
(With Talia Kurlansky) *International Night: A Father and Daughter Cook Their Way around the World*, Bloomsbury (New York, NY), 2014.  
*Frozen in Time: Clarence Birdseye's Outrageous Idea about Frozen Food* (for children; based on Kurlansky's book *Birdseye: The Adventures of a Curious Man*), Delacorte Press (New York, NY), 2014.  
*City Beasts: Fourteen Stories of Uninvited Wildlife*, Riverhead Books (New York, NY), 2015.

Contributor to anthologies, including *The Junky's Christmas*, *Serpent's Tail*, 1994. Author of food history column for *Food and Wine*. Contributor to periodicals, including *Harper's*, *Partisan Review*, *Gourmet*, and *Audubon*. Kurlansky's works have been translated into twenty-five languages.

#### MEDIA ADAPTATIONS:

Several of the author's works have been adapted for audiobooks, including *The Big Oyster: History on the Half Shell, 1968: The Year That Rocked the World*, *The Basque History of the World*, and *Boogaloo on Second Avenue: A Novel of Pastry, Guilt, and Music*.

## Sidelights

Mark Kurlansky's years as a correspondent in Europe and the Caribbean inform his nonfiction and fiction alike. Some of his books are popular "niche histories," including *Cod: A Biography of the Fish That Changed the World* and *The Basque History of the World*. Others reflect his seven-year stay on the Caribbean islands and his affinity for the indigenous people there. "At a time when authors seem increasingly to be specialists, Mark Kurlansky is a determined do-it-all man," noted John F. Baker in *Publishers Weekly*. Baker refers to the fact that Kurlansky's books vary in subject matter, although all of them reflect his interest in the local cuisine of the countries in which he has traveled.

*Cod* and its counterpart for children, *The Cod's Tale*, trace the evolution of the cod fishing industry from the earliest European incursions into the species' North Atlantic grounds to the near-extinction of the fish that nourished millions. The work is disturbing; it charts fundamental behavioral changes in the remaining meager stocks of cod and how some fishermen have circumvented the increasingly stringent laws on quotas. "Kurlansky's tale is engrossingly tragic, as he details the sad and maddening story of how modern-day fishermen came to find themselves 'at the wrong end of a 1,000-year fishing spree,'" observed Allston James in *Whole Earth*. In a review for the *Eclectica* website, Ann Skea wrote: "This unusual, beautifully produced and fascinating little book is [Kurlansky's] own celebration of that humble but important fish, and a warning of our own fragile place in nature's closely-linked ecological web."

Kurlansky's story of the cod reveals the role played by Basque fishers and mariners in the popularization of cod as food. *The Basque History of the World* studies the ancient Basque culture, its politics, religion, customs, cuisine, and expectations for continuation not necessarily as an independent nation but as an autonomous group within two nations--Spain and France. In a review of the book for *Geographical*, Miranda Haines wrote: "Mark Kurlansky sets out to discover who the mysterious and warring people of the Basque country are. We follow the adventures and trials of famous Basque soldiers, sportsmen, bankers, whalers, fishermen, explorers and industrialists through the ages." *Atlantic Monthly* contributor Phoebe-Lou Adams characterized the book as "lively, anecdotal, [and] all-encompassing." Alan Riding, writing in the *New York Times Book Review*, deemed it "entertaining and instructive," adding: "Kurlansky needs to recount this history because it is inseparable from the Basque identity. But happily, he intersperses his political and military chronicle with lively anecdotes and digressions about everything from the origins of the Basque beret to the intricate rules of the ball game variously known as jai alai or pelota."

*The White Man in the Tree, and Other Stories* marked Kurlansky's debut as a fiction writer. The collection consists of short stories and a novella, all set in the various nations of the Caribbean and Central America. In his *New York Times Book Review* critique of the title, Bob Shacochis commented that its publication marked Kurlansky for membership in an "exclusive club of letters--peripatetic book-writing correspondents equally at ease afoot in the imagination and the world." Shacochis further praised the book for its "trove of fascinating characters and stories as potent as bush rum."

*Library Journal* contributor Joshua Cohen noted that "the uniqueness of Caribbean culture is amplified" in Kurlansky's tales "with irony, humor, and pathos." Noting the "dexterity" with which Kurlansky moved into fiction, Brendan Dowling, writing in *Booklist*, appreciated Kurlansky's "abiding love for his characters."

The author returned to the realm of nonfiction with *Salt: A World History*. This often overlooked household item serves as the focal point for Kurlansky's sweeping epic, which transports readers through time and around the world. Though many might question whether such a topic could yield enough information to fill an entire book, Kurlansky reminds the reader that salt is not merely a common kitchen item but also a commodity that helped to shape the world as we know it today. Besides littering his book with facts both basic (salt is produced by a chemical reacting to a base) and fascinating (the human body contains enough salt to fill three average-sized shakers), Kurlansky demonstrates the lasting effects salt has had on everything from religion to politics and economics. In a review for the *Library Journal*, one commentator described *Salt* as "an entertaining, informative read," while a reviewer for *Publishers Weekly* noted that the book would be "sure to entertain as well as educate."

Food and all of the memories and events that surround the act of eating serve as the focus of the author's next project: *Choice Cuts: A Savory Selection of Food Writing from Around the World and Throughout History*. Acting as editor, Kurlansky chose to include essays on a wide range of topics such as favorite restaurants, food-related reminiscences, and even the relationship between food and sex. A contributor to *Publishers Weekly* noted that Kurlansky's attention to detail and clever arrangement provides the reader with "a wide range of tastes." A *Kirkus Reviews* contributor remarked that the author "describes with wit and zest cooks, cooking, and cuisines."

In *1968: The Year That Rocked the World*, Kurlansky takes a serious look at a turbulent year in world history--a year marked by such social and political upheaval that the author starts the book with the remark: "There has never been a year like 1968, and it is unlikely that there will ever be one again." Kurlansky offers readers a global perspective on the major events that changed the course of world history in 1968. From student protests of the Vietnam War and the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy to the emergence of the feminist movement, many remember 1968 as a year marked by fear and frustration. But, as Kurlansky points out, it was also a year that brought people together through the mutual desire to make the world a better place. In a review of the book for *Spectator*, Jonathan Mirsky commented that Kurlansky's narrative of this explosive year gave him "the shivers," while a *Kirkus Reviews* contributor noted that the author "says so much so well about a year that still steals your breath away."

The author's debut novel, *Boogaloo on Second Avenue: A Novel of Pastry, Guilt, and Music*, is a colorful look at a small, ethnic community on New York's Lower East Side during the 1980s. At the center of the story is Nathan Seltzer, a Jewish man struggling with paralyzing claustrophobia, thoughts of selling his copy shop to a major chain, and the temptation to cheat on his wife with the daughter of a German pastry shop owner who may have been a Nazi. Things are further complicated by a string of mysterious shootings that terrorize the residents of the neighborhood. In an article for *Kirkus Reviews*, one critic called Kurlansky's first novel "sugary but far from insubstantial." Kevin Greczek, writing for *Library Journal*, noted the importance Kurlansky places on his characters' "experiences as immigrants" and "how their quirks help them persevere."

In his 2006 publication *The Big Oyster: History on the Half Shell*, Kurlansky once again uses a small, uncommon subject to gain a larger perspective of the world. The history of the once-plentiful oyster population, now depleted by over harvesting, helps tell the story of New York City itself. From Henry Hudson's journey up river to the present day, the oyster's path often parallels the city's. In a review of *The Big Oyster* for *Booklist*, Keir Graff acknowledged Kurlansky's knack for making "the ordinary extraordinary." A critic for *Publishers Weekly* noted that "Kurlansky's history digresses all over the place, and sparkles."

Returning to the subject of salt in the 2006 volume *The Story of Salt*, Kurlansky presents a juvenile complement to his previous 2002 book *Salt*, a volume that is geared toward adults. The picture-book format and complementing books are similar to those of the 1997 adult work *Cod* and its 2001 juvenile companion volume, *The Cod's Tale*. Thus, Kurlansky presents factual details about the history of salt alongside watercolor-and-ink illustrations by S.D. Schindler. The book portrays Mahatma Gandhi's

Salt March, salt drilling techniques, and a discussion of the discovery and use of salt through the ages. The children's version also features an illustrated timeline. According to *Horn Book* magazine writer Betty Carter, the "timeline provides facts that support what would otherwise appear as facile conclusions within the text." Notably, many commentators applauded the book, and Hazel Rochman, writing in *Booklist*, remarked that "the informal narrative" underscores "the sweeping world history of salt's essential role in human life." In a glowing *School Library Journal* review, Carol S. Surges declared that "the author mixes science, history, and personal anecdotes, resulting in a fascinating look" at the topic. A *Kirkus Reviews* contributor was also impressed, finding that "this salutary (in more ways than one) micro-history will have young readers lifting their shakers in tribute."

Returning to more adult fare in the 2006 volume *Nonviolence: Twenty-Five Lessons from the History of a Dangerous Idea*, Kurlansky applies his trademark historical overview to a somewhat more amorphous topic than is typical of his overall oeuvre. The book was an immense success and was reprinted in 2008 as *Nonviolence: The History of a Dangerous Idea*. Kurlansky is personally a pacifist, a fact he explained to John Freeman in the London *Independent*: "I grew up in a neighborhood where there was a lot of fighting. ... It's what boys did during school, during recess, after school." Kurlansky told Freeman: "I hated it. ... So I decided to not fight back. I ducked punches, blocked punches, but I didn't fight back. It sort of worked: they all went away, but I lost all standing." Only ten years later, Freeman explained, Kurlansky dodged the draft during the Vietnam War. The author's lifelong history of pacifist belief and practice is expounded upon in *Nonviolence*. Such nonviolent revolutionaries as Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., are discussed in the book. The author also examines the nonviolent roots of religion and the perversion of religious teachings to achieve violent ends. Freeman stated of the book: "For all its discussion of the abuse of religion, *Nonviolence* is actually a remarkably sanguine book about faith. Kurlansky goes back to the beginnings of the three major religions and argues that all of them began in the spirit of non-violence." Additionally, Freeman commented that, "as Kurlansky notes throughout this book, there is no word for non-violence in any language that isn't a negative of violence. Without a word, or an image, protest has to look good to be effective."

In an interview and review of the book in the London *Morning Star*, Ian Sinclair posited that "The nub of Kurlansky's thesis is that non-violence, when it has been used, has a pretty good track record of success. Violence, on the other hand, hasn't." Sinclair went on quote Kurlansky's explanation of the book's subtitle, in which nonviolence is described as a dangerous idea. "It's not so much that I think it's a dangerous idea--it's that established power has always thought that it's a dangerous idea and has always thought of non-violent activists as extremely dangerous," the author commented. Reviewers largely applauded the volume, much as both of Kurlansky's interviewers had. "This is an entertaining, interesting and sometimes inspiring gallop through parts of the history of non-violent conflict resolution," declared *History Today* reviewer Bruce Kent. It also "comes at a good time. After Iraq, the Balkans and Afghanistan there is a more general understanding that war creates rather than solves problems. No one who reads Kurlansky will be in any doubt about this," Kent concluded.

In 2008, Kurlansky returned to his more traditional writing with the publication of *The Last Fish Tale: The Fate of the Atlantic and Survival in Gloucester, America's Oldest Fishing Port and Most Original Town*. The book explores the fishing industry in Gloucester, Massachusetts, looking at how today's declining fish stock affects the people of Gloucester amidst the town's now-failing economy. "Fishermen, government, scientists ... have been working on this problem and failing. I think it's because once [a fish population] starts unraveling, it unravels at a more dramatic rate than anybody imagines, because of the decline of biodiversity and the effect of global warming on fish populations," Kurlansky told David Mehegan in the *Boston Globe*.

Martha White, writing in the *Christian Science Monitor*, concluded her review of the book by stating: "It's clear from the words of Gloucester's own 1998 poet laureate, Vincent Ferrini, that 'for Gloucester to no longer be Gloucester' would be 'unthinkable' and it's clear that Kurlansky finds it deeply and personally unthinkable, as well. This is a poignant and cautionary tale, with an end that has yet to be written."

In the well-received *The Eastern Stars: How Baseball Changed the Dominican Town of San Pedro de Macoris* Kurlansky examines the mysterious ability of one small Dominican town to produce an abundance of top-level baseball players, among them Julio Franco, Juan Marichal, George Bell, and Sammy Sosa. As the author notes, San Pedro boasts a wide-ranging and intense baseball culture, with dozens of playing fields as well as numerous training schools, academies, scouts, and local teams. Kurlansky outlines the economic and social history of the Dominican Republic, and discusses the country's struggles with stereotyping and prejudice. His answer to the question posed in the title, noted a *Kirkus Reviews* writer, is "both simple and heartbreaking: Baseball is hope."

The same reviewer hailed *The Eastern Stars* as a work of honesty and sensitivity. Though *New York Times Book Review* contributor James Traub considered the book "somewhat formless," he admired it as a "charming and finely observed" work. *USA Today* writer Bob Minzesheimer also admired *The Eastern Stars*, praising it as "fascinating social history ... [that] is as much about politics and culture as it is about baseball."

Kurlansky edited *The Food of a Younger Land: A Portrait of American Food before the National Highway System, before Chain Restaurants, and before Frozen Food, When the Nation's Food Was Seasonal, Regional, and Traditional: From the Lost WPA Files*, a book that *New York Times Book Review* contributor Jonathan Miles described as a "time capsule" about Americans' eating habits during the years before and during the Great Depression. In fact, the book draws from materials that were collected in 1940 and 1941 as part of Federal Writers' Project (FWP) editor Katherine Kellock's planned project to publish a book titled *America Eats*. Kellock and her staff hired writers to travel throughout the country to document regional cuisines, recipes, and cultural lore about food. The FWP offices received reams of reports, recipes, essays, poems, interviews, and stories; these were sent out to rewriters, who shaped them into more coherent form. But with the country's entry into World War II in December of 1941, the book project was abandoned, and Kellock deposited the collected materials in the Library of Congress, where Kurlansky discovered it decades later while researching an anthology of food writing.

Kurlansky organized this material but preserved the original language of the writings, including misspellings and dialects. Some of the material, wrote Miles, citing a "baffling rant against mashed potatoes," is quirky and puzzling. But other pieces, including a "stunning prose poem" about the land of Diddy Wah Diddy by Zora Neale Hurston, are gems. The reviewer was also amused by the fact that, while the book documents major changes in American eating patterns, it also shows enduring similarities between earlier generations and more contemporary ones. Many writers, for example, complain that things were better before their time, and they bemoan families' increasing reliance on canned vegetables and commercially produced bread and dairy products. Such sentiments, observed Miles, parallel the "tender regard for more simpler, more authentic times" seen in food writing of the early 2000s.

Among the book's wealth of material are squirrel recipes from Arkansas; a piece on how the Sioux people prepared buffalo meat; a guide to the slang of New York luncheonettes; and a poem about Nebraskans' love for frankfurters. Recipes are enhanced with anecdotes and helpful tips, and they sometimes include folk wisdom such as the tip that cooks will receive mail from the direction in which their pies are pointing when placed on the dinner table, or that the rising sun destroys all the special flavor of barbecued beef. Other highlights include pieces from writers such as Eudora Welty, who writes graciously of her beloved Mississippi cuisine that "Yankees are welcome to make these dishes. Follow the directions and success is assured."

Observing that the pieces in *The Food of a Younger Land* were written many decades ago, *Christian Science Monitor* reviewer Bridget Huber noted that "the food system they depict is remarkably like the one the Michael Pollans and Alice Waters of the world today argue for so passionately--one that narrows the gap between consumer and producer, is sustainable, and resituates breaking bread together to the center of our culture."

Kurlansky's third work of fiction, *Edible Stories: A Novel in 16 Parts*, a collection of linked short stories that take food as their unifying theme. Stories here range from a U.S. senator who makes a surprising cultural bridge in "Menudo," to the story of Robert Eggle who loses not only his memory, but also his sense of smell and taste. Other stories deal with Bordeaux wine, blood sausages, or sea salt.

*Edible Stories* won praise from *New York Times Book Review* contributor Mark Bittman, who observed that "every page ... reflects the depth of Kurlansky's eclectic knowledge, and almost every page features his wit and charm." Though the reviewer found the book lacking in structure and coherence, Bittman nevertheless enjoyed the book's pervasive humor and the author's erudition.

Kurlansky examines the power of the interrogative in his short work, *What? Are These the Twenty Most Important Questions in Human History--or, Is This a Game of Twenty Questions?* one of several titles published in 2011. The sentences in this book are written as questions and deal with topics ranging from literature to the meaning of life and death. The book includes numerous woodcut illustrations by the author.

Reviewing *What?* in *Booklist*, David Pitt felt that Kurlansky "has a good point to make ... by questioning accepted wisdom." Pitt further thought that this book "leaves us with a new appreciation for the power of the question mark." Less impressed was a *Kirkus Reviews* contributor who termed *What?* a "conceptual essay collection as parlor game." The same reviewer felt that the work "might try the patience of some readers," and that "two of the chapter titles anticipate two of the likely responses: 'So?' and 'Huh?'" Harsher criticism was offered by London *Independent Online* contributor Doug Johnstone, who termed it "a poorly thought out, badly executed, glaringly superficial look at the nature of human inquiry, that is all the more disappointing because Kurlansky is capable of writing excellent books."

Kurlansky turns his attention to a baseball great in another work from 2011, *Hank Greenberg: The Hero Who Didn't Want to Be One*. Here Kurlansky tells the story of this Bronx-born athlete who battled against the anti-Semites when he played for the Detroit Tigers in the 1930s. A defining moment came for him when he refused to play on Yom Kippur. Unlike many other Jewish athletes of the era, Greenberg did not hide his roots or religion, though he was in fact not a very religious man. But by his willingness to be recognized and understood as a Jew, he helped to turn around the prejudice against Jewish athletes. Greenberg later served in World War II and eventually took a management role in baseball. Just as Jackie Robinson helped to break the color line in baseball, Greenberg did the same for religion, managing to win over the crowds in Detroit, one of the most anti-Semitic cities in the United States at the time.

A *Publishers Weekly* reviewer had praise for *Hank Greenberg*, noting that this "slim volume puts a fascinating period of sports history into a vivid cultural context." Similarly, Bill Scheft, writing in the *New York Times Book Review*, felt that Kurlansky's "scholarly slice of Hank Greenberg is always winning." Scheft further noted: "Kurlansky is refreshingly outward-looking. Everything is put in context, especially the relationship of Jews to sports and sports to Jews as a path to assimilation."

In two other books from 2011, Kurlansky addresses a juvenile or young adult audience. His novel *Battle Fatigue* focuses on the early influences of teenage Joel that lead him to become a conscientious objector during the Vietnam War. As a kid, Joel played war games using the cast-off uniforms of World War II veterans. But these vets never talked of their war experiences, Joel came to see, calling their evil feelings of those experiences battle fatigue. He took to heart his father's discussions of the senselessness of war, and when ultimately he receives a draft notice, he realizes that this is his moment to stand up against policies with which he disagrees.

Writing in *Voice of Youth Advocates*, Meghann Meeusen commended the novel, noting: "Filled with metaphor and, at times, heart-wrenching poignancy, the text reveals much about the complexity of war and social action." Likewise, a *Kirkus Reviews* writer termed the novel a "penetrating examination of a teen's interior process." On the other hand, *School Library Journal* contributor Wendy Scalfaro, noting

that the book provides needed historical background for the Vietnam War, went on to comment: "However, while the characters are believable, they are underdeveloped. Also, the pace is too slow, and the ending is anticlimactic."

A second work for young readers from 2011 is *World without Fish: How Could We Let This Happen?*, "an urgent account of the problems that threaten the world's oceans," according to a *Publishers Weekly* reviewer. Here Kurlansky, a former commercial fisherman himself, addresses the problem of overfishing, which could lead to the extinction of major fish species in the coming decades. Kurlansky provides young readers an overview of the crisis from the point of view of the fishing industry, politicians, and consumers, and also addresses the problem in terms of cultural values. Along with the nonfiction facts and figures, comic book panels provide a fictional tale of a scientist and his daughter who experience the extinction of fish species.

A *Kirkus Reviews* contributor found this book "depressing and scary yet grimly entertaining." Similarly, *Booklist* reviewer Carolyn Phelan thought that this "eye-catching, clearly written book presents a topic that is not well represented in books for young people." Further praise for *World without Fish* was offered by *Geographical* writer Victoria Lambert, who noted: "This riveting book on the threats facing marine life around the planet is a masterwork ... [and] a call to arms for the younger generation to reclaim the oceans for fish."

Kurlansky has written two books about Clarence Birdseye, a name that would be familiar to consumers shopping in the frozen-food section of the grocery store, for it was Birdseye who created the frozen-food industry. Kurlansky offers a biography of the inveterately "curious" inventor and tinkerer in *Birdseye: The Adventures of a Curious Man*. Birdseye was born in Brooklyn, New York, but he spent his adult life in far-flung regions of the world in an effort to slake his curiosity about seemingly everything. Yearning for an outdoor life, he dropped out of Amherst College in 1908 and traveled to the American Southwest as a naturalist for the U.S. Biological Survey. He collected ticks in Montana to aid in research into Rocky Mountain spotted fever. When he was working in the frozen stretches of Labrador, he became interested in food preservation when he observed that native Inuit people froze food almost instantly and that the food tasted fresh when thawed, leading him to win a patent in 1927 for a method for freezing food. In subsequent years he had to not only convince consumers that frozen food was wholesome and flavorful but also to urge and promote the development of an infrastructure of refrigerated trucks and rail cars for transporting frozen foods. He became a millionaire when Marjorie Merriweather Post bought out his company for 23.5 million dollars.

With *Birdseye*, Kurlansky bolstered his reputation among readers and reviewers for nonfiction of the highest order. One exception was Peter Hepburn, who wrote in *Library Journal*: "This is not a gripping portrait of an individual. The lack of connection between the readers and the subject (rather than just his inventions) makes this one of Kurlansky's less-successful outings." In contrast, a *Publishers Weekly* reviewer commented: "Covering the science behind Birdseye's other inventions along with intimate details of his family life, Kurlansky skillfully weaves a fluid narrative of facts on products, packaging, and marketing into this rags-to-riches portrait of the man whose ingenuity brought revolutionary changes to 20th-century life." A *Kirkus Reviews* contributor called the book "another satisfying dish from the remarkable menu of the author" and summarized the book in these terms: "Kurlansky tells the exciting tale of Birdseye's adventures, failures and successes (he became a multi-millionaire) and his family, and he also offers engaging snippets about Velveeta, dehydration and Grape-Nuts. The author notes that Birdseye knew that curiosity is 'one essential ingredient' in a fulfilling life; it is a quality that grateful readers also discover in each of Kurlansky's books." For Mark Knoblauch, writing in *Booklist*, "Kurlansky's narrative gifts shine through every chapter," a view seconded by Joanne Latimer, who wrote in *Maclean's*: "If the history of frozen food doesn't sound fun, you've underestimated Kurlansky. He has a gift for turning dry topics (salt, cod) into narrative gold. This biography is packed with swashbuckling tales of a curious man who made a fortune betting on his own ingenuity." Agreeing with this assessment, in turn, was Marie Arana. Writing in *Washington Post Book World*, Arana called the book "brisk" and observed that "Kurlansky is best known for epic

portraits of small-scale subjects, among them *Salt*, *Cod* and *The Basque History of the World*. He brings a nimble, no-frills journalism to these tasks, and the result is a series of eye-opening books on worlds we might otherwise never see."

*Frozen in Time: Clarence Birdseye's Outrageous Idea about Frozen Food* is an adaptation of *Birdseye* for young readers. The book covers the same ground as *Birdseye*, although a *Kirkus Reviews* contributor objected that a "distressing byproduct of this adaptation is that several sections are not as clearly written as in the original. Overall, though, it's a fascinating story of curiosity, imagination and invention." A more positive review came from Bob Hassett, who wrote in *School Library Journal*: "Kurlansky provides ample context, detailing relevant social and economic conditions (for instance, there was a correlation between population density and the spread of refrigeration in Brooklyn) and crediting a wide selection of contemporary and competing inventors. This is a compellingly told story with obvious curriculum connections."

In *Ready for a Brand New Beat: How "Dancing in the Street" Became the Anthem for a Changing America*, Kurlansky chronicles the history of "Dancing in the Street," a classic 1960s hit by Martha and the Vandellas. He tells the story not only of the song itself but also the stories of the Motown record label behind it, its founder, Berry Gordy, and such iconic singers as Marvin Gaye. Along the way, Kurlansky provides a social history of the 1960s, placing the song and its inspiring lyrics in the context of the civil rights movement, the freedom riders, the 1963 March on Washington, the British invasion, the war in Vietnam, riots in Watts and other U.S. cities, and white flight to the suburbs. In this connection the author discusses various interpretations of the song, which has been variously regarded as a party song, a civil rights anthem, a black nationalist anthem, and a feminist anthem. Kurlansky notes that testimony to the song's impact is provided by other songs whose lyrics seem to mimic those of "Dancing in the Street," including the Rolling Stones' "Street Fighting Man" and Bruce Springsteen's "Racing in the Street."

A *Publishers Weekly* reviewer praised Kurlansky for "deftly" chronicling the history of the song. A *Kirkus Reviews* contributor, calling the book "fascinating but flawed," objected: "Plainly, change was in the air, and to overload this one hit with too much revolutionary significance in a 1964 that also gave the world 'The Times They Are A-Changin' and 'A Change Is Gonna Come' blurs cause and effect." More enthusiastic was *Booklist* writer June Sawyers, who found the book "compelling, fascinating, and entertaining" and concluded by calling it "a rousing history of an iconic song."

Kurlansky's versatility as an author is demonstrated by two very different back-to-back books: *International Night: A Father and Daughter Cook Their Way around the World*, which he wrote with the help of his daughter, Talia Kurlansky, and published in 2014; and 2015's *City Beasts: Fourteen Stories of Uninvited Wildlife*. The first of these is essentially a cookbook that also manages to provide a kind of world tour. One night each week, Kurlansky would give a globe a spin, and his young daughter would randomly pick a location that would provide the theme for a Friday-night dinner. The book, then, presents 250 recipes for fifty-two meals. An Indian night includes an appetizer, a lamb entrée, and two vegetable side dishes. Other locales and their cuisines include New Orleans, Tanzania, and Cornwall, England. A *Publishers Weekly* reviewer predicted: "Both teens and adults will find the brief country profiles enlightening, and a bibliography of international cookbooks provides fine fodder for a family library."

*City Beasts*, in contrast, is a collection of fourteen short stories, each having to do with the intersection between a specific human community, which is identified in the story's title, and animal populations. In each of the stories, the fates of animals and humans are intertwined, even though people might not notice the crows, coyotes, or alligators that study them. Some of the stories include elements of magic; examples include "Gloucester: The Science of Happiness in North Shore Frogs" and "San Sebastian: Begona and the Bear." The elements of a perfect crime appear in "Miami: The Alligator Teeth of an Unknown God." The conflict between ranchers and conservationists drives "Idaho Locavores: A Trilogy of the Sawtooth Wolf." In "Odd Birds of New York," Kurlansky tells the story of a

scarlet ibis and a green quetzal, using their escape from a New York zoo to capture the stir of activity in Manhattan with its blend of human and animal inhabitants.

Rick Roche, reviewing *City Beasts* for *Booklist*, found the stories "suspense-filled." More effusive was Becky Krystal, who commented in *Washington Post Book World*: "While the title rings with whimsy, [Kurlansky's] prose--detailed but not improbably over-the-top--lifts the imaginary into the realm of the real." Krystal went on to observe: "While more often thought-provoking and bittersweet than gut-bustingly funny, Kurlansky sprinkles in wit that mitigates the melancholy." She concluded by noting that "the title of *City Beasts* suggests an up-close examination of animals, but the real 'beasts' in this well-rounded collection are people--weird, wild and alien."

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## FURTHER READINGS ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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